

(Washington, DC) Today, Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-Miramar) made the following statement in response to the Senate Armed Services Committee's hearing on the discriminatory policy known as Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell continues to hurt our troops, runs counter to the values of our Armed Forces, and threatens our national security. Last year, we lost 428 service members to Don't Ask, Don't Tell at the cost of over \$12 million. It is about time that we get serious about repealing this bigoted law once and for all.

"I applaud Defense Secretary Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen for sharing their support and plan for bringing about the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell. It is my sincere hope that the high-level working group led by Pentagon General Counsel Jeh Johnson and General Carter Ham will deliver the information that Congress needs to finally repeal this law.

"While these are indeed historic steps in the right direction, I am concerned that, under the current review and implementation timeframe proposed, our brave gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) service members will not be able to serve openly for at least another few years. Furthermore, while I welcome interim proposals within 45 days to mitigate the effects of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, the fact of the matter is that being gay in the military means either staying in the closet or risking discharge.

"As Vice-Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, I cannot stress enough how important all our service members are to our operations around the world.

"In his testimony, Secretary Gates stated that the review group will need to 'engage men and women in uniform and their families' in order to assess their views regarding the effects of Don't Ask, Don't Tell repeal and implementation. The very nature of this law prevents service members from speaking openly, and both the U.S. military and Congress will need a way to obtain this critical information.

"In December, I introduced H.R. 4180, the Honest and Open Testimony Act. My bill helps

provide for an honest and open discussion regarding Don't Ask, Don't Tell repeal by allowing active-duty members of the Armed Forces, including GLBT members, to openly testify in Congressional hearings and share their ideas concerning implementation without fear of retribution.

“As far as I am concerned, this law should have been repealed long ago. It is time to take action and to replace Don't Ask, Don't Tell with a policy of non-discrimination and inclusion. I remain committed, as I always have been, to doing everything in my power to make this happen as soon as possible.”

Congressman Alcee L. Hastings is Vice Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, a senior member of the House Rules Committee, and Co-Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission.

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